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TITLE: Maximizing Success of Referrals of HIV-Infected Individuals Identified Through New York State Department of Health's (NYSDOH) Anonymous Counseling and Testing (ACT) Program

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ISSUE: HIV-infected individuals identified through NYSDOH's ACT program are referred for medical care and support services. However, tracking receipt of referrals has been challenging due to the individuals' anonymous status. In order to ensure that HIV infected individuals receive services; NYSDOH's ACT program has strengthened its referral and tracking system.

SETTING: Community clinics, county and state correctional facilities and special initiatives targeting highrisk populations (i.e. migrants, the homeless, and substance users.)

PROJECT: The approaches to improve HIV-infected individuals' access to services include: (1) a behavioral counseling approach to identify individuals most likely to be HIVinfected during the pre test session, (2) program policies, including one allowing HIVinfected individuals to change their test status to confidential, that facilitate entry into care, (3) required scheduling of follow-up appointments for HIV positive individuals to enable ongoing communication on the need for and receipt of referral services (4) a comprehensive documentation and monitoring system, and (5) staff training related to behavioral counseling techniques and the elicitation of partner notification information.

RESULTS: Overall improvement in linkage of HIVinfected individuals to services has been documented. Data obtained for the first three months (11/98/99) of the improved tracking system demonstrated increases in both posttest return rates (from 84% to 93%) and test result conversion rates (57% to 71%) for HIV infected clients. Preliminary data related to the receipt of referral services and completion of partner notification activities are promising and will be included in the presentation.

LESSONS LEARNED: Using creative strategies, ACT programs can track the outcomes of referrals of HIV infected individuals. In order to maximize success, supportive program policies and intensive staff training are required. These efforts increase staff support and improve the accuracy of data collection. The need for ongoing followup must be clearly communicated to HIV-infected individuals since they may expect that program contact will cease after the posttest session.

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